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9 Feb 68

The Honorable John L. McClellan, Chairman
Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Committee on Government Operations
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The following is in response to your letter of 29 January 1968:

Our estimate of the Soviet threat to United States naval forces in the early 1970's has increased somewhat from last year as the result of the introduction of a new air-to-surface missile system [redacted] for use on Badger bombers. The introduction of the new missile will probably result in the retention of Badger B bombers in Naval Aviation well beyond the previously estimated phaseout about 1971.

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As you may recall from press reports at the time, the Soviets displayed several new fighter designs at the Moscow air show on 9 July 1967. Two of these new types of fighters will probably be deployed to operational units in the near future. Historically, the Soviets have introduced a new or modified design about every two years. The number and type of fighter designs displayed suggests increased emphasis by the Soviets on aircraft suitable for use in conventional or limited warfare.

With respect to Soviet Tactical Aviation, the apparent concern for contingencies short of general nuclear war will probably result in considerable effort being devoted to the development of more versatile aircraft. We estimate that one of the fighters displayed at the air show--the one which we have designated Foxbat--will become operational in interceptor, attack, and reconnaissance roles. Its deployment in Tactical Aviation will probably begin within the next two years. The Soviets also displayed a variable wing fighter at the air show--we have designated it the Flogger--which is similar in configuration to the U.S. F-111. We expect the Soviets to begin deployment of this aircraft, or of another new tactical fighter which probably will have variable geometry wings, about 1972. The Soviets also displayed several experimental vertical or short take-off and landing fighters at the air show, and an aircraft of that type may also be deployed with Tactical Aviation in the early 1970's.

With the advent of more complex, capable, and costly aircraft, the capabilities of Tactical Aviation will increase, even though its numerical strength may decline somewhat. We estimate that by 1977 the number of aircraft in operational units will fall within the range from 2,600 to 3,200. As is the current practice, a large number of older aircraft will probably be retained in reserve as a hedge against any contingency.

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Largely to offset the lack of high performance interceptors, the Soviets in the past have kept large numbers of older model aircraft in service longer than we expected. Now that new interceptors are being deployed in increasing numbers, however, the need for extremely large numbers of aircraft for the Home Air Defense Forces will diminish. The overall capability of the interceptor force will probably improve significantly during the next decade even though there is a decline in the number of aircraft. We estimate that the numbers of interceptors in the force will decline to about 2,375-2,300 by 1972, and to about 1,800-2,400 by 1977. The trend in the force level will depend largely on the rate at which the Soviets chase out aircraft over 15 years old.

It is hoped that this information will be useful to your Subcommittee. If we can be of any further assistance, please let us know.

Sincerely,

/S/

Richard Helms
Director

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